Reviewer's report

Title: Exploring Changes in Open Defecation Prevalence in sub-Saharan Africa Based on National Level Indices

Version: 2 Date: 1 April 2013

Reviewer: Eric D Mintz

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Major Compulsory Revisions: None

Minor Essential Revisions:
Background, First Para, Last sentence: Please indicate the year in which these figures (8% and 35%) apply. For example, “In sub-Saharan Africa in 2010, OD was practiced by ….”.

Methods, Government Policy and Practice, only sentence. Please insert a semi-colon after “sanitation policy” and before “or 2)”.

Discussion, Fifth Para, Second sentence: Please add” status” at the end of the sentence (“…to achieve OD free status.”)

Discretionary Revisions:

Abstract: Background, second sentence: Reference 27 does estimate that diarrhea caused more childhood deaths than respiratory diseases in Africa in 2008 (19% vs 18%); however, a more recent paper by the same group provides estimates for 2010 that differ, and have diarrheal diseases in second place after respiratory diseases (12% vs. 17%). The authors may wish to say “a leading cause” or “one of the top two causes” of child mortality in Africa to be on the safe side. The newer reference is by Li Liu and was published on line by the Lancet on May 11, 2012. This same comment applies equally to the first sentence of the Conclusions.

Background, First or Second Para. 1) One may wish to name the categories of hardware included in “improved” and “unimproved” sanitation as defined by the JMP. Readers unfamiliar with the field may think that OD is the only form of unimproved sanitation, while this is decidedly not the case. There is a Figure in one of the JMP reports (I believe it was the 2010 report) that does this well. 2) One may wish to convey to the reader here, or elsewhere, that because of population growth, a decrease in a JMP indicator which is based on the proportion of the population may not reflect a decrease in the absolute number of people classified by that indicator. The relevant example from Reference 7 is the fact that the proportion of the population in sub-Saharan Africa who practiced OD decreased by 11% from 1990 to 2010, but the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa who practiced OD increased by 33 million during that same period.
Methods, Data Sources, only sentence. It would be ideal to indicate in supplementary materials which sources of data were used for each country – in other words which survey(s) (MICS, DHS, WHIS, MIS, country reports, etc.) were used from which dates for each of the 34 countries and to provide the reader with links to these.

Conclusions, First Para, Sixth sentence: I must have missed the fact that “Internal conflict emerged as a potential obstacle for sanitation progress” when it was presented earlier in the paper. It is not clear how that fact emerged from the analysis as described in the Methods section, but I would think that it perhaps deserves more “play” before the Conclusions.

Reference # 9: “Social Science &amp” appears to be a typo, or the digital equivalent.


Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, but I do not feel adequately qualified to assess the statistics.

Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'